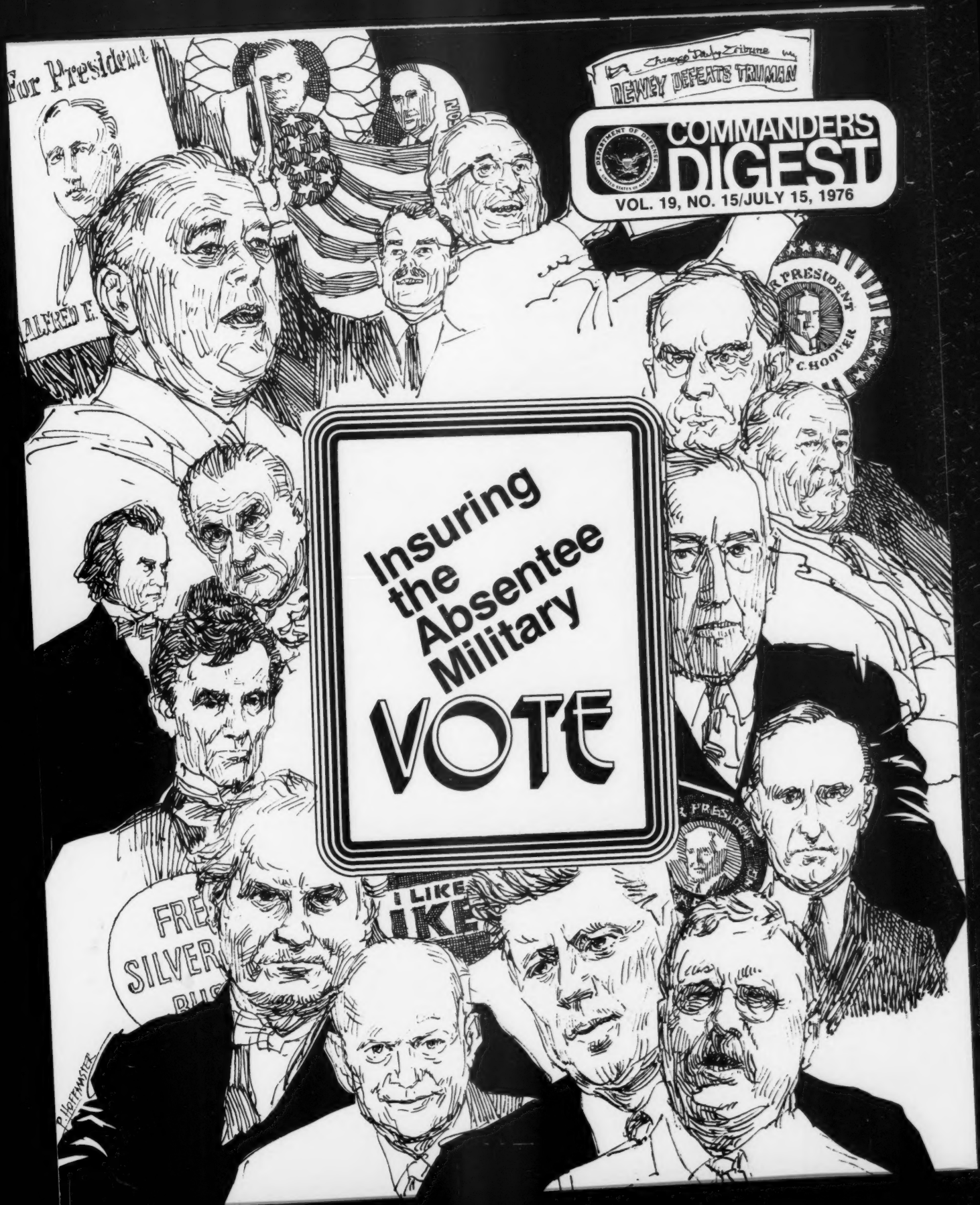
Chicago Daily Tribune
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COMMANDERS DIGEST
VOL. 19, NO. 15/JULY 15, 1976
Insuring the Absentee Military VOTE
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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

MEMORANDUM FOR Secretaries of the Military Departments
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Director of Defense Research & Engineering
Assistant Secretaries of Defense
Director Telecommunications and Command and Control systems
Directors of Defense Agencies

SUBJECT: Federal Voting Assistance Program—1976

During the bicentennial year, it is fitting that we think about the basic rights of Americans which are enumerated with such eloquence in our Declaration of Independence.

Among those rights is the ability to choose who will govern. Historically, Americans have exercised this fundamental right through the secret ballot—either at the polling place or through the absentee process.

The absentee ballot is available to all active duty Service members who, because of their responsibilities, cannot vote in person at the polls. Commanders must ensure that all eligible voters are informed of the absentee voting rules, procedures, and deadlines in each member's election jurisdiction.

To assist potential voters in requesting their absentee ballots, commanders will assure that all eligible personnel have received, in-hand, Federal Post Card Applications for Absentee Ballot by August 15 if overseas, and by September 15, 1976, if in the continental United States.

The Department of Defense will continue to provide voting information, materials, and personal assistance to Armed Forces members and their families.

W. P. Clements, Jr.

Deputy

How Commanders Can Help Military Members Exercise Their Right to . . .

EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS FOR VOTING PROGRAM

This is designed to assist in the implementation of the Command Information Program specified in the Department of Defense Voting Action Plan for 1976, which was issued to Military Service Secretaries Nov. 21, 1975.

The outline below, tailored to meet individual Service needs, will cover every essential element in providing Armed Forces personnel who desire to vote with the information and assistance they need to effect an absentee ballot.

RECOMMENDED MATERIAL SUPPORT

Armed Forces Information Film No. 265—"Have Your Say"

Armed Forces Information Film No. 281—"What Can I Do?"

Voting Assistance Guide(s), 1976

Voting Posters: DoD P-31, DoD P-36, DoD P-38, DoD P-50, DoD P-53, DoD P-57, DoD P-69, DoD P-75A, DoD P-83, & DoD P-86

Federal Post Card Applications (FPCA) for Absentee Ballot (SF 76)

Defense Information Guidance Series, "Citizenship & Patriotism" (Nos. 23-3, 23-4, 23-7, 23-8, 23-9, January 1976)

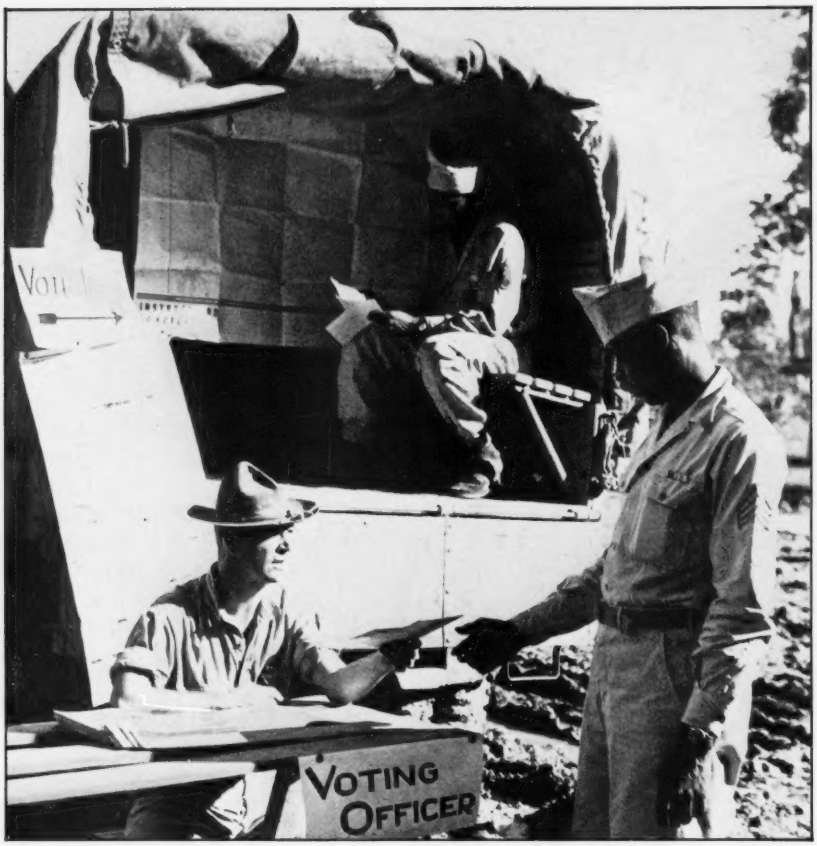
SAMPLE OUTLINE

I. Introductory Remarks

II. Armed Forces Information Film No. 281 (motivational; approximate length: 23 minutes)

III. Remarks by Commander, Voting Assistance Officers and Counselors, and Local Election Officials (if desired)

- Scope of 1976 elections, and possible ballot items
  1. Contested offices:
     - —President and Vice President
     - —House of Representatives and one-third of Senate
     - —Governors and thousands of state and local officials
  2. State and local referenda and initiatives
  3. Every U.S. jurisdiction holds major elections in 1976
- Effect of elections on citizens
  1. Powers of elected officials
  2. Examples of subject areas where political decisions have great impact on the individual:
     - —Pay, benefits, education, retirement
     - —Federal, state, and local taxation
     - —How and where to spend tax dollars
     - —Costs of goods and services
     - —Availability of energy
     - —Environmental quality
     - —Questions of war and peace



The Servicemen's Voting Rights Act was only two years old in 1944 when these soldiers in Europe visited their Voting Officer for assistance in completing an absentee ballot.

—Public and industrial safety and working conditions

- How to exercise the right to vote
  1. Eligibiity requirements:
     —Age
     —Citizenship
     —Registration (if required)
     —Various state and local qualifications
  2. Obtaining absentee ballot:
     —The Federal Post Card Application (Function, use and where to obtain additional ones).
  3. Voting assistance:
     —Scope
     —Where and when available
  4. How and where to obtain other information:
     —Candidates
     —Issues
     —Rules, procedures, deadlines
  5. Voting assistance for spouses and dependents
  6. Registration and voting locally

IV. Armed Forces Information Film No. 265 (Procedural; approximate length—19 minutes)

V. Summary, Question and Answers

VOTING HISTORY

For most of the first century of the existence of the United States, the right of Service members away from home to participate in elections was virtually non-existent. Only two states addressed this issue before the Civil War. New Jersey permitted militiamen and volunteers to vote absentee— but only between 1815 and 1820. At the beginning of the War Between the States, Pennsylvania was the only state that authorized absentee voting.

The development of military absentee voting is a major segment of the overall history of the expansion of voting rights in the United States. The voting rights and opportunities enjoyed by today's Service member are vastly different from the limited rights accorded soldiers and sailors in the past.

Contributing to the slow and often uneven development of

Absentee Registration Ballot Request And Voting Deadline Chart

This chart is intended to assist voting officers in using the 1976 Voting Assistance Guide and is not intended as a substitute for or replacement of the Guide. Due to variations of the state election laws, the information in the chart applies to Servicemen and women, but not necessarily to their spouses and dependents. Ballots should be voted and mailed in sufficient time to reach the election officials not later then the deadline dates shown on the chart below.

STATE	ABSENTEE REGISTRATION DEADLINE	ABSENTEE BALLOT REQUEST DEADLINE	BALLOT RECEIPT DEADLINE
ALABAMA	Oct. 23	Oct. 28	Nov. 2
ALASKA	Oct. 3	Oct. 29	Nov. 2
ARIZONA	Oct. 28	Oct. 29	Nov. 2
ARKANSAS	NSRR	NDD	Nov. 2
CALIFORNIA	Nov. 2	NDD	Nov. 2
COLORADO	Oct. 1	Oct. 29	Nov. 2
CONNECTICUT	NDD	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
DELAWARE	Oct. 3	Oct. 3	Nov. 1
D.C.	Oct. 3	Oct. 26	Nov. 2
FLORIDA	Oct. 3	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
GEORGIA	Oct. 2	Oct. 28	Nov. 2
GUAM	NSRR	NDD	Nov. 2
HAWAII	NSRR	Oct. 26	Nov. 2
IDAHO	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
ILLINOIS	NSRR	Oct. 28	Nov. 2
INDIANA	Oct. 4	Oct. 30	Nov. 1
IOWA	NDD	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
KANSAS	NRR	NDD	Nov. 2
KENTUCKY	Oct. 3	Oct. 26	Nov. 2
LOUISIANA	Oct. 2	NDD	Nov. 2
MAINE	NDD	NDD	Nov. 2
MARYLAND	NSRR	Oct. 25	Nov. 2
MASSACHUSETTS	NRR	NDD	Nov. 2
MICHIGAN	NDD	NDD	Nov. 2
MINNESOTA	Oct. 12	NDD	Nov. 2
MISSISSIPPI	Oct. 2	NDD (noon)	Nov. 1
MISSOURI	NRR	NDD	Nov. 1
MONTANA	Oct. 3	NDD	Nov. 2
NEBRASKA	Oct. 29	Oct. 29 (voted Nov. 2)	Nov. 3
NEVADA	Oct. 3	Oct. 26	Nov. 2
NEW HAMPSHIRE	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
NEW JERSEY	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
NEW MEXICO	Oct. 5 (T)	Oct. 5 out U.S.	Nov. 2
		Oct. 23 in U.S.	Nov. 2
NEW YORK	NSRR	Oct. 23	Nov. 2
NORTH CAROLINA	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 1
NORTH DAKOTA	NRR	NDD	Nov. 2
OHIO	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
OKLAHOMA	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
OREGON	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
PENNSYLVANIA	NSRR	Nov. 1	Oct. 29
PUERTO RICO	Apr. 30	Sep. 1	Oct. 28
RHODE ISLAND	NSRR	Oct. 12	Nov. 2
SOUTH CAROLINA	Oct. 3	Oct. 30	Nov. 2
SOUTH DAKOTA	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
TENNESSEE	NSRR	Oct. 26	Nov. 2
TEXAS	Oct. 29	Oct. 29	Nov. 2
UTAH	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
VERMONT	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
VIRGIN ISLANDS	NSRR	Oct. 13	Nov. 2
VIRGINIA	Oct. 28	Oct. 28	Nov. 2
WASHINGTON	NSRR	Nov. 1 (voted NLT)	Nov. 2
		(recd NLT)	Nov. 17
WEST VIRGINIA	Oct. 3	Oct. 18	Nov. 2
WISCONSIN	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2
WYOMING	NSRR	Nov. 1	Nov. 2

NDD—No deadline date.
NRR—No registration required.
NSRR—No separate registration required.
(T)—Temporary registration.
NLT—No later than.

military voting rights has been the power of each individual state to determine, in large part, its own absentee voting laws. This is also the reason today why the procedures of voting vary from state to state.

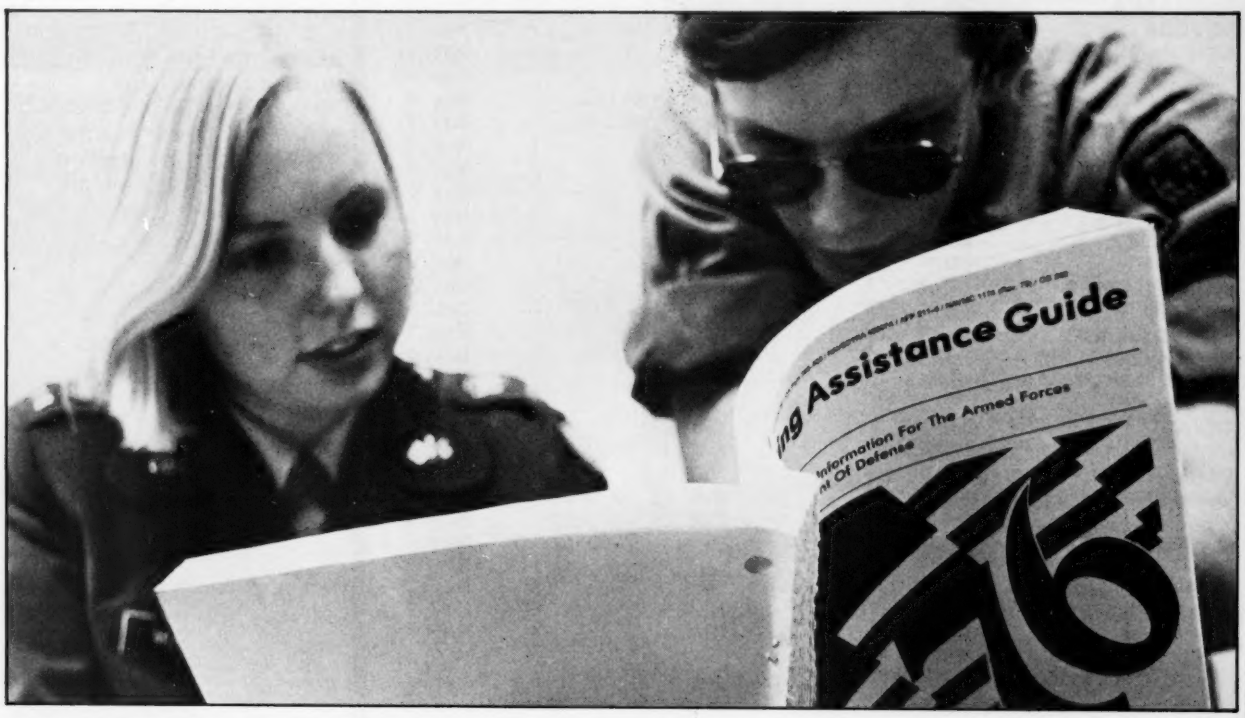
SOUTHERN STATES FIRST

Eleven Southern States, perhaps realizing the need for votes in favor of secession, passed laws in 1861 permitting their soldiers to vote in the field. It was not until a few years later that the Northern States enacted similar laws with respect to their soldiers.

These early absentee voting laws varied greatly. In some cases the ballot was voted in the field and given to a member of the Serviceman's family to place in the hometown ballot box on election day; in other cases all members of a unit from a particular state would vote in one place and a member of that unit would take the voted ballots to the home state for counting. These limited rights granted Servicemen during the Civil War were eliminated by the states after the war, either by repeal or by allowing the laws to expire. Moreover, some states even went so far as to specifically deny absentee voting rights to men serving in the Regular Army. This was in keeping with the intent of the wartime voting laws which were designed to enfranchise the soldiers serving only for the duration of the war. The career soldier and sailor were expected to remain apart from the political process.

SPORADIC ATTEMPTS

During the period between the end of the Civil War and World War II there were only sporadic and half-hearted attempts by a few states to grant sufferage to their soldier citizens. During World War I, despite popular agitation for such a law, Congress refused to pass a soldiers' voting law, believing that the vote could not be taken without seriously interfering with the efficiency of the Serviceman in the field. Individual states did enact statutes permitting absentee voting; however, they were of little or no effect due to administrative

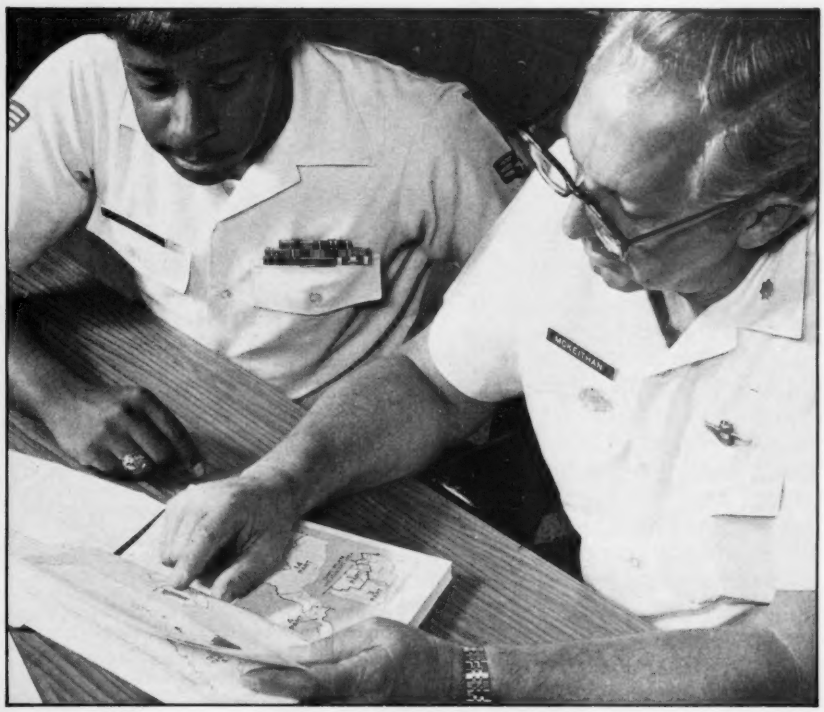


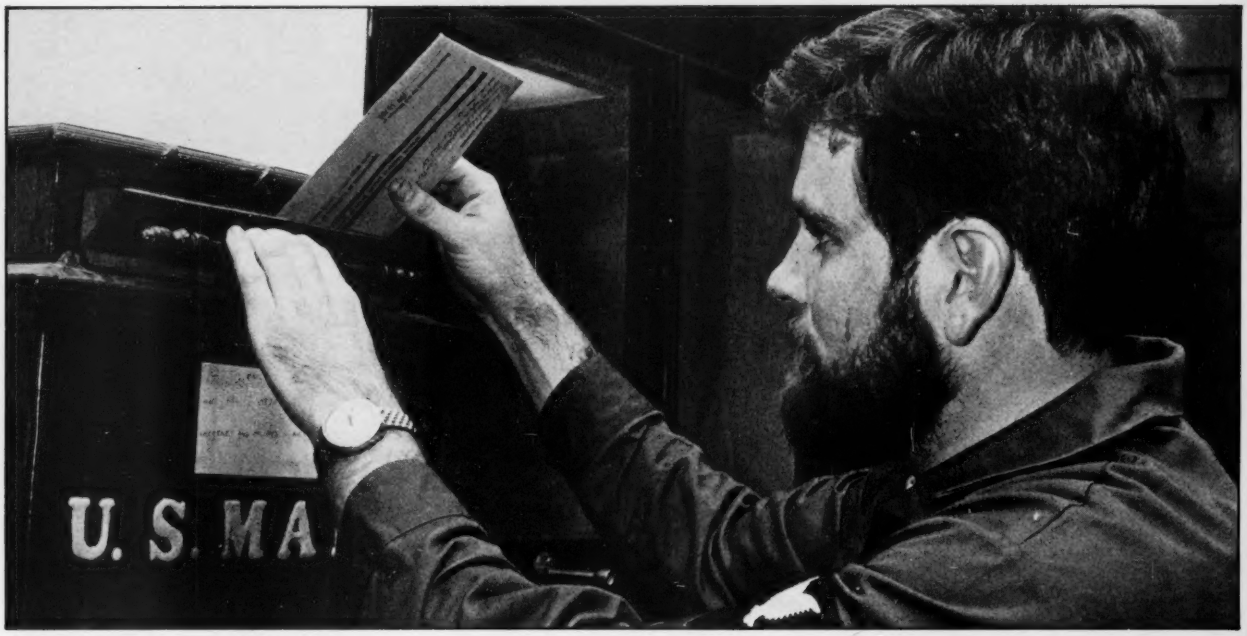
difficulties, uncertain communications and lack of cooperation from field commanders.

Although Servicemen could not effectively vote during World War I, the general progressive trends that followed the war, including women's suffrage, expanded overall voting rights. It was not until September 1942 that the Servicemen's Voting Rights Act was adopted, giving all Servicemen away from their residences in time of war the right to vote for U.S. Senators, U.S. Representatives, and Presidential electors. Problems continued because of the many differences among state laws controlling the methods by which absent residents could register and vote. For this reason the 1942 law was amended to include recommendations to the states to facilitate absentee registration and voting. That amended law was the predecessor of the current Federal Voting Assistance Act.

After World War II, as at the end of previous wars, state laws enabling absentee voting by Servicemen lapsed or were repealed. Congress amended the Federal law to provide for permanent absentee voting for members of the Armed Forces. The amendment, however, did not overcome the deficiencies in remaining state laws, and it was

The steps to completing an absentee ballot by a military member usually begin with a visit to the Voting Assistance Officer at the unit level where reference material is available. Rules for absentee voting in the member's home state are outlined in the Voting Assistance Guide. The final responsibility, however, rests with the military voters themselves.





A Serviceman completes the final and most important step in requesting the Absentee Ballot. Continued publicity on voters' rights has helped make the Absentee Voting Program a success in the military.

not until the outbreak of the Korean War that a vigorous effort was made to facilitate absentee voting by Service members.

VOTING ASSISTANCE ACT

As a result of this effort the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955 was passed and remains the basic guide to the states for revising their absentee voting laws. This law applies to all Service members and eligible members of their families, and is effective in times of hostility as well as in peacetime. The Act sets forth the responsibilities of Executive Branch departments and agencies to assist absentee voters to register and cast their ballots, and makes special recommendations to the states to adopt uniform voting provisions.

All of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Territories of Guam and the Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico now permit their residents serving in the Armed Forces to vote absentee. This is a great difference from earlier times when military voters were looked upon with suspicion and given a limited right to vote only in time of war. What is now considered to be a fundamental right is, in fact, the result of a long, slow, and sometimes difficult process of merging states' rights and the needs of individual military voters.

COMMANDERS DIGEST

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